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AUTHOR Cots, Josep Maria
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ABSTRACT

An approach to teaching second language learners the pragmatic aspects of communicative competence is discussed. The approach uses analysis of verbal interaction to explain four areas of skill and knowledge related to communicative competence: grammatical competence; sociolinguistic competence; discourse competence; and strategic competence. It goes beyond the functional approach by expanding the student's perspective to complete, real interactions. The first section of the discussion explains the rationale behind such qualitative analysis. The second section outlines three areas of communicative competence: sociolinguistic, textual, and strategic. Subsequently, sections are devoted to more thorough discussion of those three areas and their use in analyzing interactional requirements and verbal strategies to cope with them. Examples are drawn from an actual conversation (text appended) between a professor and a doctoral student in an American university. (MSE)

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TOWARD A PEDAGOGICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE OF NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH

Josep Maria Cots

The author of this paper shows that it is possible to explain to the language learner how pragmatic competence is accomplished. This can be done by approaching the notion from a modular point view, i.e. as the product of the joint cooperation of three areas of knowledge: sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic.

The analysis is based on a dynamic approach to communicative competence, which takes into account not only the various pragmatic parameters (power, imposition, goals, etc.) and the role of the speech event in a given institution, but also the position of an utterance in the discourse. Pragmatic competence is considered as being locally and interactionally accomplished, with no intrinsic qualitities which may be defined *a priori* in semantic or formal terms.

In the second part of the paper it is shown how the approach proposed can be applied to an analysis of a 'gate-keeping' encounter between a university professor and a student. The analysis is centered around the specific linguistic knowledge and skills that the participants display in order to reach their respective goals while at the same time maintaining the interactional norms of the social situation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The text included in the Appendix of this paper is a transcription of a real conversation which took place in the office of a professor in an American university. P is a male professor in his 40s, and S is a 30 year-old male Ph.D. student who has finished his doctoral courses and only needs to complete his dissertation. S had asked P sometime ago if he would write him a letter of recommendation for a teaching job. P accepted but told him he would need the details of the job so that his letter could emphasize precisely those aspects required for the job.

The ideas presented in this paper are intimately related with the author's experience as a foreign language pedagogue. They have to do mainly with the need to describe and explain the use of an important part of the total linguistic production of a native speaker of the language. I am referring to instances of use like those emphasized in the transcription of the conversation (see Appendix I). One characteristic of some of the selected segments is that they are usually considered as not systematic and, therefore, classified as the product of imperfect linguistic performance rather than linguistic competence. Notice, for example, the underlined truncated sentential structures in extracts (1) and (2).

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(1)

1	P	Hi Dan.
2	S	Sorry to take up your time but uh

(2)

43	S	That's [ ] I'm willing to do that [*laughter*] so I'd >
44	P	|mhm mhm
45	> S	really appreciate it. And he [ ] there's a little bit of
46		urgency.

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But perhaps the most important feature of these segments is that their presence must be explained in terms of contextual factors (linguistic or extra-linguistic) like the role or the purpose of the participants, the stage in the conversation in which they appear, the format of communication (turn-taking), etc. For example, the number of non-imposing elements (underlined) in the request by the Student in extract (3) is influenced by his powerless position with respect to the Professor.

(3)

15 anthropology. [ ] And uh if you could, I guess just
16 mention my teaching abilities, what I've done here.

Another example is the exchange in extract (4), which can only be explained taking into consideration the fact that it takes place in the closing stage of the conversation. P signals willingness to close ("ok") and commits himself to a future event ("I'll send it off"). S accepts closing ("ok") and expresses gratefulness to P for his commitment ("thanks a lot I appreciate it").

(4)

52 P Ok. I'll send it off.
53 S Ok. Thanks a lot I appreciate it.

In attempting to provide students with an understanding of what it is that makes a language user sound like a native speaker one often feels the need for a larger model of language description which could take into account both the grammar of the language and the pragmatic factors present in every instance of linguistic communication.

The description of language proposed in order to face this problem is one based on the notion of *strategy*. This is a useful term to refer to the speaker's and listener's systematic use of linguistic and general socio-cultural knowledge to achieve their intended goals when producing or interpreting a message in a given context.

The aim of this paper is to suggest an approach to the analysis of verbal interaction which would combine the explanatory strength in terms of specific linguistic strategies triggered off at each interactional circumstance with a dynamic concept of situated meaning, that is to say, meaning as the product of context and negotiation.

2. A DESCRIPTION OF LANGUAGE USE

Language use can be described from two different points of view: (i) *what* is it that the user must know in order to use that language, and (ii) *how*, *where* and *why* does the user activate a particular area of this knowledge in specific instances of language behaviour. My interest in the study of language use falls mainly on the second aspect, that is to say, on the user's "capacity for realizing the indexical value of language elements in the communicative process" (Widdowson, 1984, p. 234).

The option of studying actual performance rather than competence forces the analyst to face the problem of having to live without rules establishing univocal correlations between form and function and form and notion. The user's intuitions as well as the detailed analysis of the data suggest the idea that the basis for language use is not so much a matter of rule government but rather a matter of internalized fuzzy "schemes of prediction and expectation" generalized and exploited as "useful approximations to reality" (Widdowson, 1984: 235).

The basis for the analysis of language use cannot be found in the possible range of utterances present at one stage of the conversation but rather in the *interactional requirements* with which the user is confronted throughout a conversation. It is in the light of these requirements that the different linguistic segments must be explained and classified. The interaction itself will allow us to see how successful the strategy applied has been in helping the speaker to fulfill the requirement.

One of the first questions that this kind of qualitative analysis suggests is that of the analyst's biased interpretation of the interaction, especially if we think that the material upon which we are working is not the actual conversation but a taperecording of it, that is an approximation. A first answer to this question is provided by Tannen (1984), saying that the investigator is not aiming at offering THE explanation but ONE possible explanation. Ultimately, it is only the language user, himself/herself, who must confirm whether the kind of explanation provided agrees with his/her intuitions and understanding of the phenomena studied. The second answer is that the kind of interactional requirements upon which the analysis is built must fulfill two basic requirements: (i) they have been extensively pointed out in the literature as useful analytic tools for description verbal interaction; (ii) they have been ethnographically validated by means of the analyst's close acquaintance with the context and the participants in the interactions described. It is also important to stress that the relevance of one interactional function must be confirmed by the orientations of the participants themselves (Schegloff, 1988). Thus, we see that an expression like *I believe I could do a good job* appears on three occasions (see Appendix: lines 20, 25 and 32), a signal of the relevance to the user of the meaning he is trying to convey with it. The same happens with expressions of uncertainty.

(5)
It looks like (4)
I don't know if you (8)
apparently (10) (24)
I guess (13) (14)
I believe (19) (23) (29)
I hope (34)

A second question which one has to answer in this type of analysis is the plurivalence of some segments in terms of their function and the kind of interactional requirement they are meant to resolve. This fact, however, rather than proving a shortcoming of the type of analysis proposed, is a consequence of the multifunctionality of natural language, a fact which has been pointed out by Halliday (1978) and Schiffrin (1987) among others. An example of the multifunctionality of a discourse segment could be the parenthetical verb *I believe* in the utterance *I believe I could do a good job* , which can be classified as developing two interactional functions: (i)Presentation of Self: the Student wants to present himself as little assertive; (ii) Information Structure: the Student expresses his uncertainty towards a future event.

The third question is that of the scope and delimitation of each linguistic segment with an interactional function. The analyst of real language performance should be prepared to cope with the following ideas suggested by Jucker (1986, p. 58): (i) it is doubtful whether there is a finite set of speech acts; (ii) it is even more doubtful whether speech actions can be mapped onto utterance units and viceversa by means of specific functions; (iii) utterance units cannot be defined a priori without taking into account the function being performed in the actual circumstance. I think that the approach adopted in this analysis, according to which the language user tries to resolve an interactional requirement with whatever resources he/she has at hand rather than with functionallyand formally pre-defined linguistic structures, should allow us to view language use from a dynamic perspective, as a process of constant negotiation of meaning. An example of this negotiation of meaning can be seen in the emphasized expressions in extract (6),

whose interactional function can only be assigned looking at the context in which they appear, and paying attention to the rather passive attitude of the Professor in the rest of the interaction.

(6)

32 S enthusiastic about. So I believe I could do a good job there
33 in theaching.
34 P Sounds good.
35 S |????
36 P It sounds like a nice job. Lafayette. ????

The analyst's task must be to find out how successful a segment of talk has been in reaching a specific outcome, and whether the orientation that he/she initially assigned to it is coherent throughout the interaction. If we are to tell the foreign language learner not only *how* and *when* but also *why* people use a specific utterance we must aim not only for a description but also an explanation of the data. This explanation can only be found in the specific outcomes the practices of ordinary discourse are intended to reach.

3. A TÁXONOMY OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

The analytic framework proposed in order to analyze pragmatic competence is based on Halliday's functional perspective of language (Halliday, 1978). The different interactional requirements with which the language user comes across are considered to belong to different modes of meaning or functional components of the semantic system. The need to distinguish among different components of meaning in verbal interaction has also been supported by conversation analysts like Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1987), Schiffrin (1987) and Cheepen (1989).

Following Canale's (1983) model of communicative competence designed for the preparation of foreign language curricula one can distinguish among three areas of pragmatic competence: *sociolinguistic*, *textual* and *strategic*.

The *sociolinguistic* component is defined as the kind of knowledge and skills necessary to produce and understand utterances *appropriately* (both in form and in content) in different sociolinguistic contexts depending on contextual factors like genre, topic, purpose, setting, participants, message form, message content, act sequence, norms for interaction and norms for interpretation.

The interactional requirements included in this component are:

(i) Presentation of self.
(ii) Difference in social power.
(iii) Social distance or degree of solidarity.

The textual component is concerned with all those grammatical and semantic devices with the function of achieving a unified text. It has to do mainly with *cohesion* and *coherence* and all those efforts of both the speaker and the listener to maintain them throughout the text.

The interactional requirements in this component are:

(i) Turn-taking organization.
(ii) Goal.
(iii) Topic.
(iv) Information structure.

The third component of pragmatic competence is one which is of special relevance given the applied perspective of this type of analysis of conversational discourse. Canale calls this component *strategic competence,* and it includes the following phenomena:

> verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action for two main reasons: (a) to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to limiting conditions in actual communication (e.g. momentary inability to recall an idea or grammatical form) or to insufficient competence in one or more of the other areas of communicative competence; and (b) to enhance the effectiveness of communication (e.g. deliberately slow and soft speech for rhetorical effect) (Canale, 1983, p. 10-11)

Breakdowns and lack of effectiveness in communication are two very common problems in foreign language learners and they rarely have the necessary knowledge and skills to cope with them. The interactional requirements in this third component are:

(i) Human Constraint.
(ii) Language Constraint.

In the next three sections it will be shown how a great deal of verbal phenomena can be covered in an analysis by using the concept of *interactional requirement* and that of *verbal strategy* to cope with it.

4. SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

4.1. Presentation of self

The requirement of *presentation of self* includes all those strategies addressed to maintain or restore the public image of the participant. The strategies that appear in the interaction analyzed are:

(A) Displaying unassertive personal attitude

> it looks like it (4)
> I don't know if you (8-10)
> apparently (10) (26)
> I guess (14) (15)
> I believe (20) (25) (32)
> I hope so (37)

(B) Emphasizing a positive face

> I believe I could do a good job (20) (25) (32)
> I'm really enthusiastic about (30-32)
> I'm encouraged (37)
> I'm willing to do that (43)

4.2. Power

Interactional *power* is defined by Brown and Levinson (1978) as the degree to which one of the participants in the interaction can impose his/her own plans and self-evaluation (face). This interactional requirement involves all those segments in which one of the participants recognizes explicitly or implicitly the difference in social or interactional power. The strategies considered here are:

(A) Apologizing

> sorry to take up your time (2)

(B) Requesting

if you could, I guess just mention (15-16)

(C) Thanking

Thanks a lot. I appreciate it (53)

4.3. *Social distance*

The interactional requirement labelled as *social distance* includes all those efforts to increase or reduce the solidarity factor between the participants. In coping with this variable the speaker may choose between trying to get affectionately or intellectually closer to the addressee or emphasizing the lack of shared experience. The three following strategies are present in the conversation:

(A) Personalizing

Hi Dan (1)

(B) Breaking formality

Hi Dan (1)
I guess (14)
pretty good job (25)

(C) Sympathizing

sure (17)
sounds good (34)
it sounds like a nice job (36)

5. TEXTUAL COMPETENCE

5.1. Turn-taking

With *turn-taking* organization as an interactional requirement we can describe a series of phenomena with one characteristic in common: their presence is restricted to face-to-face interactional discourse. All the strategies deployed take into account the cooperative nature of this type of discourse. Their function is not that of conveying a specific propositional content but rather following the necessary norms of cooperation. The following strategies are used by the participants in the conversation:

(A) Supplying backchannel

mhm (11) (18) (21) (31) (42) (44)
mhm' (6)
hm (21)
yeah (24) (50)
sounds good (34)
it sounds like a nice job (36)
Cajun, really? (41)

(B) Demanding response

you know (48)

5.2. Goal

Goal is an important interactional requirement in transactional encounters of this kind where at least one of the participants approaches the interaction with a

very specific purpose. The kind of goals negotiated and the outcomes, the point in the interaction in which they appear, and the relationship between participants and goals are three objects of study under this requirement.

(A) Defining the encounter (ritualized expressions at the beginning and at the end of the encounter)

sorry to take up your time (2)
Ok. I'll send it off. (52)
Ok. Thanks a lot I appreciate it. (53)

(B) Introducing goals (form and staging)

Got that thing? (3)
And uh if you could, I guess just mention my teaching abilities, what I've done here. (15-16)
So I'd really appreciate it. And he [ ] there's a little bit of urgency (43-46)

5.3. Topic

The interactional requirement of topic includes the topics selected for discussion within a conversation as well as the way in which they are approached. Part of this requirement are also the strategies speakers adopt to introduce, develop or shift topics. The strategies in the present conversation could be defined as:

(A) Signalling topic boundaries

and (15) (19) (26) (45)
so (43)

(B) Introducing topics

the (4) (7)

(C) Developing a topic agenda

letter > position > background > position > Cajun > country > deadline

5.4. Information structure

Information structure covers aspects like thematization structures, markers of the status of the information (e.g. probable, certain, uncertain, unlikely), markers of the attitude or point of view of the speaker towards that information, and discourse connectors signalling relationships between two utterances (e.g. temporal, causal, contradiction, etc.). The strategies are:

(A) Assessing information

apparently (10) (26)
I guess (14) (16)
I believe (20) (25) (32)

(B) Signalling external relationships

so (25) (29) (32)
and (7) (10)

(C) Reformulating

well (51)

6. STRATEGIC COMPETENCE

6.1. Human constraint

The interactional requirement defined as *human constraint* includes all those moves by the speaker to compensate for the problems originated in the limited capacity of the human being in the production and reception of speech. I am referring to problems such as sudden loss of the argumentative line, lack of the necessary or precise knowledge (linguistic or world-knowledge); limited time to articulate speech, etc. In the conversation we can see the following strategies:

(A) Vocalizing silence

uh (2) (13) (14) (15)

(B) Generalizing

thing (3)

(C) Repairing

well (51)

6.2. Language constraint

Language constraint involves all those devices available to the speaker to increase the effectiveness of verbal communication. In some cases it is necessary to reinforce or diminish the literal meaning of the expression by means of modifiers. In other cases it is possible to use optional items like metaphors or interjectional expressions.

(A) Modifying literal meaning

I'm really enthusiastic (30-32)

(B) Using effective substitutes (e.g. interjections)

Oh, I don't need that (9)

7. CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, the aim of this paper was to propose a way of explaining interactional discourse by integrating the findings of different areas of research into a pedagogically oriented model of communicative competence which has been proved useful in the preaparation of foreign language curricula. The main characteristic of this model is that it considers communicative competence as consisting of four different areas of knowledge and skill: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence.

The functional perspective has proved to be one of the most effective appproaches to second language teaching, but in many cases it has only paid attention either to isolated speech acts or to short communicative routines. The analysis carried out, based on complete real interactions, wants to face the high degree of flexibility of natural language to overcome problems at different levels of discourse.

From the point of view of the language learner, the kind of qualitative analysis proposed does not intend to support a hypothesis about what a group of speakers of American English systematically do. Rather, the analysis should help the learner to discover the relevance of certain pragmatics factors when interacting in that

language. Equipped with this experience, the language learner himself/herself, should be able, through his/her exposure to real language use, to construct and later confirm or discard his/her own hypothesis about what a group of speakers systematically do.

One last point that needs to be made is intended to respond to the scheptical feelings that the analysis proposed may arouse among language educators and researchers who favour a more abstract view of reality, which would allow for an explanation of specific usage phenomena in a more comprehensive way. To this Stubbs (1986, p. 61) offers the following counter-argument:

> A general problem with much applied social research is that it tells practitioners, in different words, what they know already, if only unconsciously. However, making explicit the principles of good teaching practice is precisely one important aim of applied discourse analysis. The systematic study of language in use provides many ideas for teaching, from lesson plans to whole syllabuses. Just as importantly, it provides a principled and explicit basis for work that is done, by relating it to a coherent theory. This is what is meant by applied linguistics: theory which suggests and illuminates practice.

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THE AUTHOR

Josep Maria Cots is a lecturer in English Language and Linguistics at the University of Barcelona at Lleida.

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P- Hi Dan.
S- Sorry to take up your time but [ ] uh
P- Got that thing ?
S- | It looks like it, right. This is the [ ] position in Southwestern Lousiana'
P- Mhm'
S- John Gibson' [ ] And this was the [ ] the letter you'd written to Santa Fe Community College. I don't know>
P- | Oh, I don't need that
>S if you [ ] And they called yesterday. Apparently it's >
P- Mhm =
>S a teaching job
S- = It's uh calls for a bio-archeologist, but someone who's able to teach, I guess a four-field uh introduction anthropology. [ ] And uh if you could, I guess just mention my teaching abilities, what I've done here.
P- | Sure.
P- Mhm.
S- And uh I was a [ ] teaching assistant for Nunez, [ ] in cultural. And I believe I could do a good job >
P- | Hm mhm
>S teaching cultural anthropology. I had a lot of it as a masters student at F.S.U. =
P- = Yeah.
S- So I believe I could do a pretty good job in a four-field introductory course. [ ] And [ ] apparently, uh it's a small department. They don't have a graduate program. There are only thirty-five majors, anthropology majors, in the department. [ ] So the emphasis is on undergraduate teaching, which is, I'm really
P- Mhm.
S- enthusiastic about. So I believe I could do a good job there in teaching.
P- Sounds good.
S- | ??????
P- It sounds like a nice job. Lafayette. ?????
S- | I hope so. I'm I'm encouraged. Lafayette. I've never been there but
P- It's good Cajun country. You've got to learn to speak French.
S- Cajun, really?
P- Mhm.
S- That's [ ] I'm willing to do that. [*laughter*] So I'd >
P- | Mhm mhm
>S really appreciate it. And he [ ] there's a little bit of urgency. They're narrowing the list down to the three people they wanna bring and interview. So he was hoping to be able to get the references by, you know, the earliest first of next week.
P- Yeah. =
S- = Or, well, the latest first of next week. So
P- Ok. I'll send it off.
S- Ok. Thanks a lot. I appreciate it.
P- You're welcome.

KEY TO TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

.	Falling intonation as at the end of a declarative sentence.
,	Continuing intonation: slight rise or fall in contour
[ ]	Self-interruption.
|	Point at which one speaker's turnstarts overlapping with that of the previous speaker.
=	No noticeable pause between the end of one turn at the beginning of the next.
>	No interruption of the turn.
'	Rising intonation as if for a yes-no question.
[*italics*]	Paralinguistic or extralinguistic information.
????	Segment of speech not understood by the transcriber.